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cruise guide

Owls hoot and holler year-round throughout North America, but their mysterious and secretive personalities, bright eyes and camouflaged plumages always make us think of fall. That's why this issue is chock-full of impressive owl facts and the most adorable photos—ahem, quickly flip to the back cover!

Learn all about the distinguishing characteristics of the barn owl, like how its white heart-shaped face helps it hunt, in "Nocturnal Hunters" on page 20.

And in "Hooo's Hiding in Your Backyard" on page 30, meet the stealthy owls that might already be lurking within your neighborhood. Find out which is the smallest yet fiercest of the bunch, and learn the sounds they make so you can identify them as they hoot from the shadows.

I have many owl memories, but a favorite is from a quick visit to the shore of Lake Michigan last November, where I tried to convince my Uncle Kurt that the bird we were looking at was a snowy owl, not a gull. Twenty minutes later, the conversation ended with him saying, "Huh, I think that's an owl!" And I replied, "I know."

Finding an owl is different from watching a songbird; for one thing, owls are typically so still that you almost can't believe they're real. I'd love to hear your owl tales—share them at *birdsandblooms.com/submit*.

Kristen

KIRSTEN SWEET, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

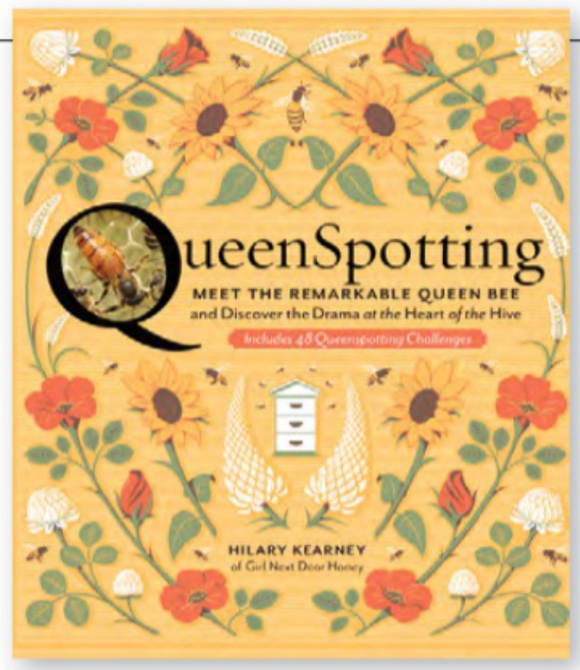
This Month

GET AWAY

Travel to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in central New Mexico for Festival of the Cranes, Nov. 20-23. It's a sandhill crane migration hot spot.

Read

QueenSpotting by Hilary Kearney offers in-depth information about queen bees and includes 48 challenging photos that give you a chance to find her within the hive.



Make It

Hide a vase full of colorful autumn blooms in your carved pumpkin. Arrange flowers to cover the rim of the vase.

GO ON AN OWL PROWL

Look for a nature center near you that hosts owl prowls—nighttime hikes to look and listen for owls. Or grab your best birding pals and explore a local park or trail.

EXERCISE Just one hour of raking and bagging leaves burns 260 calories.

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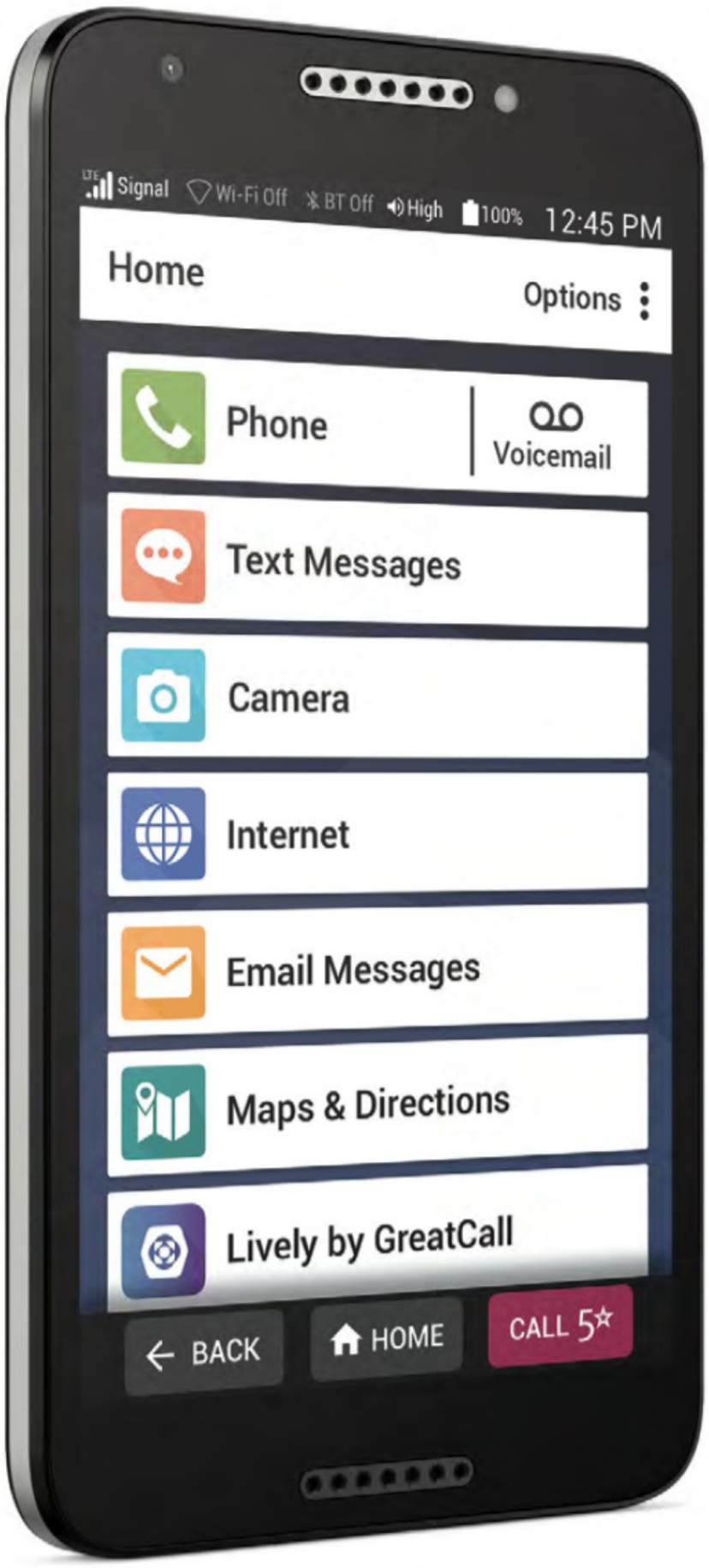

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Boost Fall Color

Russian sage adds a pop of purple to autumn gardens while attracting your favorite fliers.

Rocketman Russian sage's upright growth shoots toward the sky.

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BIRD BENEFITS

Migrating hummingbirds need nectar sources to fuel their journeys south. Encourage them to stop by and fill up with this late-season bloomer.

Russian Sage

Perovskia atriplicifolia, Zones 5 to 9

This perennial packs oodles of color, with lavender and blue blooms that appear in July and thrive into October. The lacy leaves sprout off woody stems and offer an aromatic scent. It's deer- and rabbit-resistant; just plant it in a sunny spot with well-draining soil.

Attracts:

Light needs: Full sun.

Size: 3 to 4 feet tall and nearly as wide.

Grown for: Low-maintenance color in dry landscapes.

Foliage: Gray-green leaves.

Cultivars to try: Blue Jean Baby features blue tones and shorter stalks, or enjoy Denim 'n Lace's bright, purple-blue flowers for color well into autumn.

TINY BIRD, BIG APPETITE
Redpolls eat the equivalent of about a third of their body weight every day. To attract them, plant a birch tree. In some areas, redpolls subsist mostly on birch seed.

Northern Nomads

The resilient common redpoll brings lively cheer to cool-weather feeders. **BY LISA BALLARD**

Imagine a songbird as hardy as a polar bear but as tiny as a pine siskin. The common redpoll is that bird. A member of the finch family, this tough little creature thrives in the harshest and coldest environments.

The farther south you are, the less likely you are to see a redpoll. Even in the north, they move in unpredictable ways within their range, following food sources. A flock might clean out a feeder in a day during some winters...or it might not show up at all.

"Common redpolls stay in the northern latitudes if food is readily available," explains Emma Greig, a program leader for Project Feederwatch, which is organized by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "They're fun to watch because they constantly sort out dominance."

These hungry birds usually snack on small seeds from grasses and trees, plus catkins and buds in spring and insects in summer. Groups fly in big acrobatic flocks. Alighting for a moment on one branch and then flitting to another, the petite backyard visitors are in constant motion and continually displace each other at feeders. Ones that can't manage to push their way through the crowd eat from the ground.

Emma recommends Nyjer seeds for attracting redpolls because the seeds are so small and oily. "Cold weather birds appreciate the fat," she says. They like sunflower and millet seeds, too.

These sturdy birds breed near the Arctic Circle, where they stay in willow and alder thickets, the edges of birch and spruce forests and bushy areas on the tundra. When it comes time to attract a mate, the male flies in circles while he sings and offers food.

Once paired, the female builds her nest of twigs, grass and moss on a low branch, then lines it with grouse feathers or fur. If she calls the tundra home, her nest might rest on rock ledges or shrubby ground covers. Mother redpolls lay four to seven green eggs with purple spots, which hatch in about 10 days. Chicks grow quickly, fledging after only 12 days.

Adults are about 5 inches long, with white bars on each wing and a red patch on their foreheads. They also have dark legs, yellow beaks, white bellies and notched tails. Males sport a reddish wash on their chests. There are two kinds of redpolls but the paler one, the hoary redpoll, stays in the Arctic, rarely visiting feeders in Canada.

It's easy to confuse redpolls with other brown finches, like house finches, which also have red on their heads and chests. To verify whether you're seeing a redpoll, look for the black patch around its bill and listen for its whistle-like *zap!* and *dreeee!* calls.

LEFT: JOHANN SCHUMACHER DESIGN; RIGHT: AMY LUSCHEN

THE FEED

SAVING IT FOR LATER
Redpolls stash seeds for several hours in a pouch in their throats. That useful sac stores up to 2 grams of food, or about a quarter of the birds' daily energy requirement.

Some years, redpolls are prevalent at feeders, and some years they are uncommon. Their movements show us what's happening with native, wild foods."

Emma Greig
PROGRAM LEADER, PROJECT FEEDERWATCH

SNOWBIRDS
Some birds take shelter in birdhouses or tree cavities when it gets cold outside, but not redpolls. These chill-resistant fliers sometimes roost under the snow to insulate themselves from frigid, subzero temperatures.

TOP 10

Precious Metals

Brighten beds and containers with plants featuring gold, silver and copper hues. BY KELSEY ROSETH

1

THE WHOLE PACKAGE
Gold Zebra foamy bells have it all! They tolerate shade, lure butterflies and hummingbirds, and perform well in containers or right in the garden.

1 Gold Zebra foamy bells

HEUCHERELLA, ZONES 4 TO 9

Gold Zebra's yellow and green leaves are accented with brilliant gold and blood-red centers. When watered regularly, this stunner tolerates heat and humidity as it grows up to 8 inches tall and wide. It thrives in full shade to part sun and is often used in containers or as an edging plant.

Why we love it: This deer-resistant wonder has showy white flowers that attract bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other helpful pollinators.

2 Campfire coleus

PLECTRANTHUS SCUTELLARIODES, ANNUAL

Set your beds ablaze with the bright orange foliage of Campfire. This big, bold plant tolerates both part shade and full sun. Reaching about 28 inches tall and nearly as wide, it's an evergreen perennial that won't survive frost, so most gardeners grow it as an annual.

Why we love it: The National Gardening Association also highly recommends this hardy, beautiful, no-fail coleus for new gardeners.

3 Copper Cascade foamy bells

HEUCHERELLA, ZONES 4 TO 9

The rosy orange-gold foliage of Copper Cascade lasts throughout the year. This trailing plant mounds up to 12 inches tall and 30 inches wide when in full to part shade. Well-draining, moist soil helps retain its exceptional color. In the late spring to early summer, tiny white flowers appear.

Why we love it: It's an alluring addition to containers and looks lovely spilling over landscape rocks.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS *Heucherella is a cross between two species native to North America, Heuchera and Tiarella, and features characteristics of both. The resulting hybrid cultivars like Gold Zebra and Copper Cascade are carefree and heat-loving.*

4 Arkansas blue star

AMSONIA HUBRICHTII, ZONES 4 TO 9

Prepare to be enchanted by this low-maintenance, native perennial. In fall, its feathery green foliage becomes blazing gold-yellow. It loves well-draining soil, though it's tough enough for dry conditions. This fast-growing plant reaches 3 feet tall and 4 feet wide.

Why we love it: Deer avoid it, while butterflies and bees love its beautiful, sky blue blooms.

1, 3: PHOTO COURTESY OF TERRA NOVA NURSERIES, INC./TERRANOVANURSERIES.COM; 2: WHITEFLOWERFARM.COM; 4: WALTERS GARDENS, INC

5 Northern Exposure Silver coral bells

HEUCHERA, ZONES 4 TO 9

This rounded mound of burgundy and silver leaves is a blessing for northern gardeners, as it's cold-tolerant and grows quickly. Often used as a ground cover, it reaches 24 inches tall and 16 inches wide when in bloom, thriving in part shade to full sun.

Why we love it: Keep deadheading its delicate pink blooms to ensure continued flowering from late spring into summer.

6 Silver Falls dichondra

DICHONDRA ARGENTEA, ANNUAL

Grow Silver Falls for cascading, fan-shaped silver leaves that tumble beautifully from hanging baskets or window boxes. It does well in full sun. When hanging, it grows up to 4 feet long. Planted as ground cover, it stays a lovely low 4 inches tall as it spreads.

Why we love it: This container all-star requires little to no maintenance once it's planted, and is drought tolerant.

7 Tiny Wine ninebark

PHYSOCARPUS OPULIFOLIUS, ZONES 3 TO 7

The mature stems on this delightful deciduous plant peel back, or exfoliate, to expose red and light brown inner bark. The shrub grows up to 5 feet tall and 4 feet wide, creating exceptional, copper-colored fall foliage and continued winter interest. This tolerant plant does best in full sun and adapts to most soil types.

Why we love it: Bees and other pollinators benefit from the long-lasting white or pink flowers. It looks best a little untidy, so no need to prune regularly.

DESIGNING WITH METALS *Grow plants with metallic-hued foliage near or next to companions that are less brilliant or more toned down. Give these gold, copper and silver plants plenty of room to shine and be admired without competition.*

8 Age of Gold hosta

HOSTA, ZONES 3 TO 9

Broad, golden-yellow leaves spread lushly from its center, while white and pale lavender tubular blooms attract hummingbirds. This hosta reaches 25 inches tall and nearly 6 feet wide in filtered sunlight. Morning sun helps intensify its colors.

Why we love it: Conceived and developed by renowned hosta breeder Hans Hansen, it brightens shady spaces.

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9 Burgundy Lace Japanese painted fern

ANISOCAMPIUM NIPONICUM, ZONES 5 TO 8

The intricate fronds of the Japanese painted fern emerge burgundy and turn silver-green, making it a welcome gift plant, accent or addition to an Asian garden. This perennial prefers moist soil, reaching up to 2 feet tall and wide.

Why we love it: With alluring color and texture, it's a shade staple.

GROW FOR GOLD

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- Designer Genes hosta
- Golden Delicious pineapple sage
- Isla Gold tansy
- Solar Power foamy bells
- Bengal Tiger canna lily
- Sun King Japanese spikenard

10 Jack Frost Siberian bugloss

BRUNNERA MACROPHYLLA, ZONES 3 TO 8

With cute, heart-shaped leaves and contrasting veins, Jack Frost attracts attention to shade and woodland beds. This slow-growing, silvery perennial creates clusters of blue flowers in the spring. It reaches up to 12 to 15 inches tall and wide, preferring climates with summers on the cooler side.

Why we love it: Its silver-blue finish creates a gorgeous effect, making this ground cover absolutely shimmer.

Kelsey is a writer and backyard birder from Duluth, Minnesota. She's always working to curate a bug- and bird-friendly plant collection.

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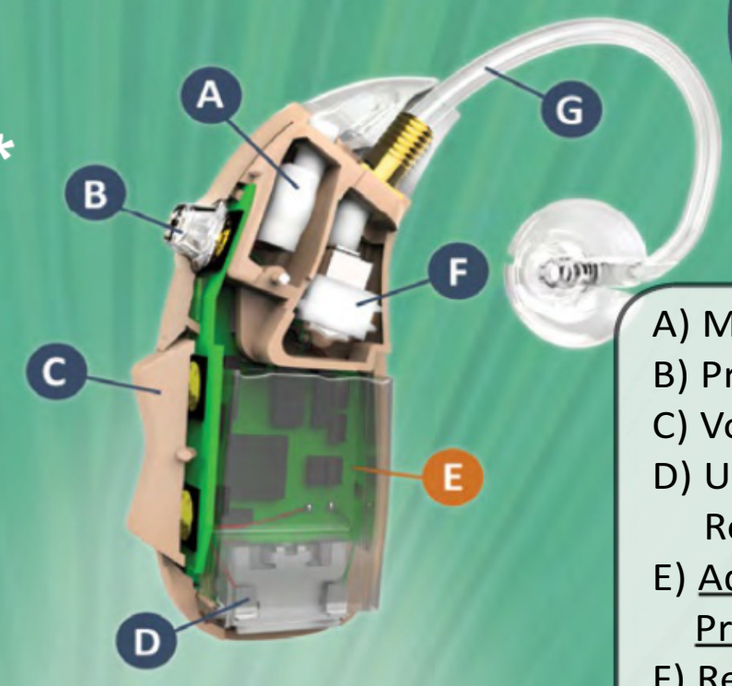

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Indoor Harvest

Grow garden-fresh ingredients year-round. BY NIKI JABBOUR

Go ahead and keep on gardening even after cool autumn weather officially arrives. Many edibles, such as tomatoes and strawberries, can be grown indoors all winter long. Follow these simple steps for creating a robust indoor garden.

LIGHT IS ESSENTIAL

"If you are going to invest time, effort and money into indoor growing, quality supplemental lighting should be your No. 1 priority," says Leslie Halleck, the author of *Gardening Under Lights: The Complete Guide for Indoor Growers*. "Tomatoes and peppers need the equivalent of full sun conditions indoors, for a long enough duration, to provide meaningful harvests."

Leslie uses ceramic metal halide high-intensity discharge 315-watt grow lamps to fruit her tomato and pepper plants indoors. She says you can also use a large T5 fixture (one that holds eight lamps) with high-output T5 fluorescent lamps. For some dwarf cherry tomato varieties, you can get away with smaller LED fixtures and a bright window.

PAMPER PLANTS WITH A GROW TENT

Serious indoor growers may want to consider a grow tent. "Grow tents create a microenvironment where you can manage light, temperature, humidity and photoperiod," the number of hours of light that a plant needs in a day, Leslie says. Some grow tents can accommodate tomatoes and peppers, as well as cucumbers, beans and squash.

POLLINATE BY HAND

Flowers of indoor fruiting plants need to be pollinated to develop. Wind-pollinated plants like tomatoes can be given a gentle shake from time to time to spread their pollen to other blooms. For crops like strawberries that are normally insect-pollinated, use a paintbrush to move pollen from the male stamens to the female pistils.

EDIBLES TO GROW INDOORS

TOMATOES

"They typically produce well with about 14 to 16 hours of light," Leslie Halleck says. Tomatoes thrive in temperatures between 70 and 78 degrees. If space is an issue, grow compact dwarf varieties like Lizzano, Tiny Tim or Micro Tom, all of which are ideal for pots.

PEPPERS

Put peppers, particularly hot peppers, in planters to grow indoors. Give them 14 to 16 hours of light, and temperatures around 70 to 80 degrees. Plant spicy habanero, jalapeno or Red Ember, or try sweet Cupid peppers.

Grow peppers in a pot with good drainage.

LEMONS

Look for a spot in your house that offers lemons bright light and cooler temperatures. "Lemons bloom year-round, so you can have different stages of ripeness at the same time," says Steven Biggs, author of *Grow Lemons Where You Think You Can't*. "Plus, they have a fantastic fragrance when they bloom." Start with a Meyer lemon, a kitchen staple, which Steven says is prolific and relatively low-maintenance.

STRAWBERRIES

The compact size of strawberry plants makes them a good choice for indoor growing. Leslie suggests looking for a day-neutral variety, as these are typically the easiest to grow indoors. Plant them in 6-inch pots, adding a bit of compost to the potting mix to enrich the soil.

More Edibles for Indoors

Try cucumbers, citrus, salad greens and herbs.

LEFT: LARS CHRISTENSEN/SHUTTERSTOCK; RIGHT: GAP PHOTOS/FRIEDRICH STRAUSS

Meyer lemons are a fragrant showpiece, boasting bright color in fall and winter.

Nocturnal Hunters

Look for flashes of white when driving down dark country roads, and you just might spot a barn owl. BY RACHEL MAIDL

FRANCIS BOSSÉ/SHUTTERSTOCK

HAUNTING VOICE

Barn owls are found on nearly every continent, even playing a role in folklore in some regions. In Europe, they were seen as bad omens. This belief might have come from their presence in church graveyards and castle ruins. These birds also have very different calls from most owls' subdued hoots. They let out dry, rasping hisses, clicking noises and hoarse shrieks that cut off abruptly.

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46514

Autumn Aplenty

Changing seasons bring cooler temperatures, colorful leaves and beautiful birds.

White-eyed vireos were in my area all summer, and I saw several of them in a wooded area I visit often. This one cooperated with me on a sunny morning—it moved out of the shadows and made itself visible so I could take a picture. The elusive birds are hard to find, but a treat to hear!

Liz Tabb ELIZABETHTOWN, KENTUCKY

STAYING CLEAN

White-eyed vireos bathe differently from many other birds. Rather than heading to a birdbath, they rub their bodies against dew-covered grass, leaves or other foliage.

Some might think black-capped chickadees are boring birds, but I consider them a force of nature. They are persistent, and I find them smart and charming. This one landed on a branch as I was waiting for the perfect moment to try to capture its spunk.

Kaitlyn Grib
RICHMOND, MAINE

This lovely great horned owl must live in our neighborhood, since we've seen it quite a bit. I took this photo as it rested after chasing prey across our backyard.

Bill Robertson
FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

Last fall, I heard there would be a chance of seeing evening grosbeaks in our area. The previous time I saw one was six years earlier. Sure enough, these gorgeous creatures stopped by my feeder for several visits.

Nancy Tully
EAST STROUDSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

I experienced a slow day of birding in northeast Ohio, but it wasn't unsuccessful. A red-bellied woodpecker with the sun reflecting off its eye is, by far, my favorite shot from that "slow" day.

Michael Phan
WILLOUGHBY, OHIO

UNUSUAL SONGS
Instead of singing complex tunes to attract mates, evening grosbeaks sound a few chirps and notes.

These eastern bluebirds proved there's always one joker in the family who has to mess up the group photo!

Rebecca Boyd KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE

I took this photo at Ojibway Park in Windsor, Ontario. The little downy woodpecker is giving a northern cardinal a not-so-impressed look for stealing its seed!

Raven Ouellette
WINDSOR, ONTARIO

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This yellow-shafted northern flicker showed off its lovely feathers in a tree near our deck, and I'm thankful I was looking outside at the right time to capture it. What an incredible beauty it is!

Ginny Phillips
OLATHE, KANSAS

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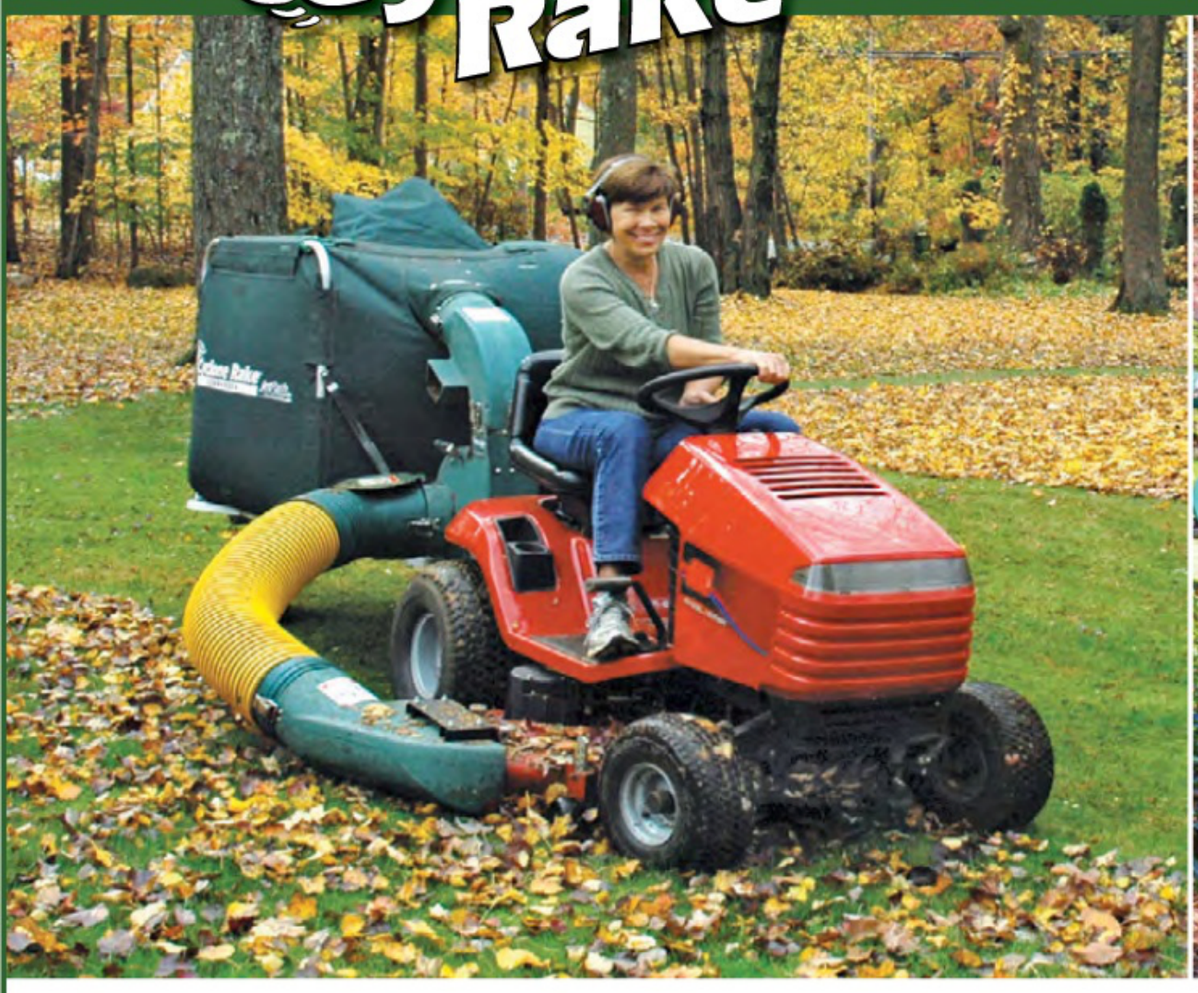

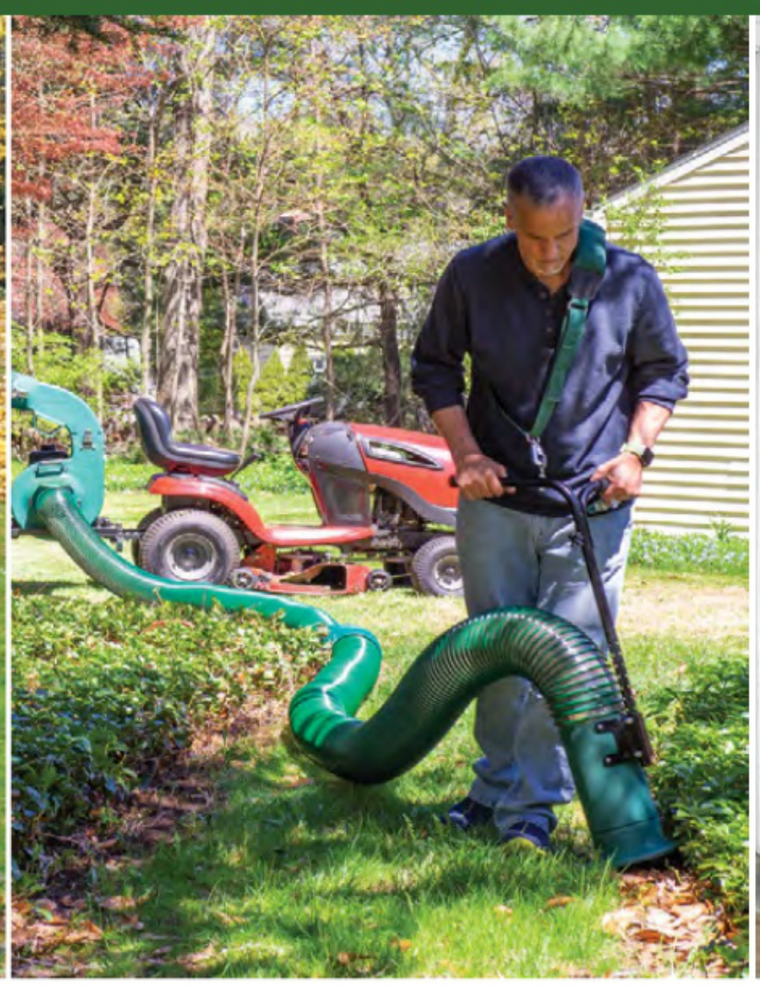

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A northern pygmy-owl peeks its head out of a tree cavity, which was most likely created naturally or by a woodpecker.

HOOOO'S HIDING

IN YOUR BACKYARD

LEFT: ROLF NUSSBAUMER NP; RIGHT: KATHY ADAMS CLARK/KAC PRODUCTIONS

The feathers of this gray morph eastern screech-owl offer natural camouflage.

MORE OFTEN HEARD THAN SEEN, THESE 10 ELUSIVE OWLS MAY BE AMONG YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD REGULARS.

BY SALLY ROTH

Great horned owls lay eggs in winter, and protect their nestlings until they are ready to leave the nest in late spring.

SECRECY AND STEALTH, PLUS THE COVER OF DARKNESS,

keep most owls out of sight. Seeing one is so special, you might think these raptors are rare birds. But they're actually all around you, hidden in plain sight.

To avoid discovery, owls perch motionless, nearly invisible in their superb camouflage. Still, other birds sometimes spot them and immediately raise a ruckus—so when you hear that kind of commotion, take a look.

And tune in at night, when most species are hootin' and hollerin', each with its own unique voice. Once you start listening for owls, you'll discover they're not rare birds at all—but definitely remarkable!

GREAT HORNED OWL

The deep hoots of these big birds (with a wingspan of 4½ feet!) are heard at night across North America in every habitat, even in cities. They're most vocal in winter, so bundle up and step outside for a listen. Their favorite food? Skunks! But their full menu is a long one, including crows and other birds, frogs, shrews, bats, rabbits and other small mammals.

BARRED OWL

Known for its call, *Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?*, this common, noisy species of the East, Midwest and Northwest is mostly nocturnal. Unlike many of its relatives with yellow eyes, the barred owl has dark eyes, which enhance its mysterious appearance.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: LARRY DITTO; CHERYL CALLEN; PURESTOCK/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Above: A barred owl rarely strays more than a few miles from its nest cavity. Below: Look for a square head and dark bill when identifying western screech-owls.

SCREECH-OWL

Worms, moths, mice, birds and other tidbits go down the hatch of these small owls. About the size of a beer glass, the look-alike eastern and western species are usually gray, but some eastern birds are rusty red and some westerners are brown. Their voices are the giveaway;

A Drink in the Dark

Screech-owls are fond of water, so get in the habit of looking for one at your birdbath or water feature at night. You won't hear the bird arrive because an owl's feathers are specially made for silence—the super soft surface and fringed edges keep prey (and us) from hearing them swoop in.

Long-eared owls are secretive and quiet, but they are sometimes spotted roosting in dense evergreen trees.

Identify short-eared owls by their pale, round faces and buff wing patches.

the eastern lets loose with an unearthly trilled whinny, while the western has a bouncing ball call that starts slow and picks up speed.

LONG-EARED OWL

When roosting, this uncommon owl stretches itself tall and thin, extending upward and flattening its feathers to disguise its shape. Not a backyard bird, it roosts in dense cover near open land where it hunts at night for mice, birds and other prey. Its range covers most of the U.S., but at different seasons. Listen for long hoots or barking.

SHORT-EARED OWL

Look twice at the next northern harrier you see gliding over a meadow or marsh, especially in the early morning or late afternoon—it may be the short-eared owl, a daytime hunter in wide-open spaces. Fall through early spring is its prime time, as its winter range covers the entire country.

NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL

That's whet, like whetstone, not wheat. This robin-sized owl's call sounds like the repeated rhythm of sharpening a saw. A rodent eater, this nocturnal owl is famously tame if approached. In fall, saw-whets spread out from their breeding grounds in northern states and western mountains, wintering in thickets and woods across the country.

Northern saw-whet owls are so small, they often eat an adult mouse over the course of two meals.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: BOB KOTHENBEUTEL (2); MLORENZ/SHUTTERSTOCK

Snowy owl

Burrowing owls look for food day and night, taking naps by their burrow entrances in between hunts.

SNOWY OWL

A winter report of a snowy owl in the Lower 48, usually at a beach, airport or field, draws bird lovers from miles to see the elegant visitor from the Arctic. The huge bird sits nearly motionless for hours between daytime hunting forays for rabbits, rodents, geese, herons or other birds. Lemmings are its mainstay up north in the tundra.

BURROWING OWL

When you see a prairie dog colony, take a closer look at those little upright figures—because burrowing owls may be among them! These small owls don't eat the animals whose burrows they move into; instead, they share watchdog duties. Beetles are a favorite prey, along with other insects, lizards, birds and mice. Birds of the West, some migrate down to Mexico and even farther south in winter. A subspecies that digs its own burrows lives year-round in Florida.

BARN OWL

If you've ever seen a big, ghostly bird swoop through the beam of headlights, you probably glimpsed a barn owl. They often patrol roadsides as well as towns, cities and wild lands for rodents. You won't hear this one hooting; instead, hissing screams are its signature call. It's widespread across all but the far northern tier of states.

NORTHERN PYGMY-OWL

It's advantageous that the pygmy-owl is so tiny—this daytime hunter is one of the fiercest birds in North America, snatching up chickadees, kinglets and even hummingbirds! Only a bit bigger than a house sparrow, the northern pygmy-owl lives in the forests of the western mountains, where it repeatedly toots during the day. ●

Laughing with friends on the patio one night, Sally Roth's raucous guffaws attracted a barred owl that perched nearby and cackled right back at her.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: LAPIS2380/SHUTTERSTOCK; KATHY ADAMS CLARK/KAC PRODUCTIONS; STEVE BYLAND

A heart-shaped white face is a characteristic that sets the barn owl apart from its relatives.

Home, Sweet Home

Screech, barred, great horned and barn owls are common nighttime birds in yards across the country, often scouting feeder areas for mice, rabbits, skunks and other critters that come out at night to nibble spilled seed. Convince them to stay with nest boxes; all except the great horned readily take to them. Put up the box in late fall, as courtship and nesting begin in winter.

Berried Treasures

The secret to a bird-friendly backyard is fruit-filled trees and shrubs.

BY LUKE MILLER

A male northern cardinal perches within a berry-laden serviceberry tree.

DANITA DELMONT/SHUTTERSTOCK

Bright red holly berries feed songbirds, like this American robin, throughout winter.

Flowers are often the first thing you notice about a landscape, and they're quite lovely. But behind those showy blooms are the true backbones of a garden: Trees and shrubs. And birds absolutely adore fruiting trees and shrubs in particular.

These larger specimens set the stage for the flowers that come and go with the seasons, and they have benefits beyond four-season visual interest. The key to getting birds to stick around your yard is providing the necessities of life. Berry-filled trees and shrubs, and seed-bearing flowers offer food and shelter.

Coincidentally, these same essentials are attractive to insects, which birds gladly snack on. As my mentor, George "Doc" Abraham, used to say, "Your backyard is for the birds. They made a deal—you feed them and they'll gobble all your bugs." The benevolent gardener gets the best part of the deal: Fewer pesky insects flying around the backyard without using potentially harmful pesticides.

Doc and his wife, Katy, were avid birders, and their garden proved it. They provided feeders and a bath, of course. But what really clinched the deal for birds was the abundance of places to nest and hide—and food. Pine, hemlock, spruce and hedges of yew provided shelter to nesters. Meanwhile, elderberry and serviceberry fed cardinals, grosbeaks and tanagers, while sumacs satisfied chickadees and conifer seeds nourished finches. The many species in the Abraham's garden—both plants and birds—made it a true bird enthusiast's paradise.

As you consider adding more trees and shrubs to your landscape, it's easy to rely on whatever you find on sale at the big box store. But some of those selections are nonnatives with low value for wildlife, or even invasive. Native shrubs are usually better—they support animals and don't become garden thugs, taking over the place.

Luke Miller is a master gardener who has planted a number of natural, bird-attracting gardens featuring shrubs and trees.

LEFT: BOB POOL/SHUTTERSTOCK; RIGHT: 1: KRZYSZTOF SLUSARCZYK/SHUTTERSTOCK;

Favorite Fruits

Make your garden more bird-friendly with top picks for berry-filled trees and shrubs.

1. Highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), Zones 3 to 7, yields a fruit cherished by people and birds alike. Just cover the plants with bird netting if you want the fruit all to yourself. Look at the hardy northern highbush blueberry or the more heat- and drought-tolerant southern highbush. Bonus: It has pretty foliage in summer and fall.

2. Serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.), Zones 3 to 9, varies by species, but most have white flowers in early to mid-spring followed in midsummer by purple fruit that dozens of bird species enjoy. Its bright fall foliage makes serviceberry a multiseason standout that rewards you for taking care of the birds. Half a dozen popular species range from small shrubs to medium-sized trees.

3. Viburnum (*Viburnum* spp.) is available in a range of species, so there's likely one to fit your growing conditions. Birds love American cranberry bush viburnum (*V. trilobum*), Zones 2 to 7, which bears masses of bright red berries lasting into winter. Other viburnum species to try: Doublefile (*V. plicatum* var. *tomentosum*), Zones 5 to 8, southern blackhaw (*V. rufidulum*), Zones 5 to 9, and arrowwood (*V. dentatum*), Zones 3 to 8.

4. Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*), also called American elder, is a highly adaptable shrub with showy flowers and small, dark blue berrylike fruits in late summer. The fruit is eaten by dozens of bird species, like catbirds, robins and bluebirds. Zones 3 to 9.

5. Dogwood (*Cornus* spp.) takes many forms. Trees include flowering dogwood (*C. florida*), Zones 5 to 9, and Kousa dogwood (*C. kousa*), Zone 5 to 8. Or try shrubs like red twig (*C. sericea*), Zones 2 to 7, and Tatarian dogwood (*C. alba*), Zones 3 to 7. People like the blooms, birds love the berries. Robins, bluebirds and thrushes are among the many dogwood fans.

6. Washington hawthorn (*Crataegus phaenopyrum*) has showy clusters of white flowers in spring and glossy red berries in fall. Finches, grosbeaks, thrashers and dozens of other species gobble the berries, so there's seldom any fruit litter to contend with and minimal cleanup for gardeners. Zones 4 to 8.

7. Holly (*Ilex* spp.) offers bountiful clusters of the classic brightly colored fruit in winter. Among the many bird-attracting species are the American holly tree (*I. opaca*), Zones 5 to 9, and the winterberry shrub (*I. verticillata*), Zones 3 to 9. In short, there's a holly for every backyard.

8. Eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) is adored by several bird species thanks to blue-gray fruits that resemble berries but are actually cones made of fused scales. The trees' pyramid shape provides dense nesting and roosting cover for many songbirds, including sparrows, robins, mockingbirds, juncos and warblers. Birds sometimes use the bark to build their nests. It grows best in Zones 3 to 9.

2: YANAMI/SHUTTERSTOCK; 3, 5, 7: COURTESY OF PROVEN WINNERS - PROVENWINNERS.COM; 4: R_SZATKOWSKI/SHUTTERSTOCK; 6: D. HURST/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; 8: B. CHRISTOPHER/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

MIGRATION

Discover how birds navigate

The biannual movements of sandhill cranes are a highlight of both spring and fall migration.

SECRETS

their awe-inspiring travels.

BY KENN AND KIMBERLY KAUFMAN

While many Canada geese, especially ones in urban areas, stay put in winter, others follow traditional pathways south.

IT'S ONE OF THE MOST ASTOUNDING PHENOMENA ON EARTH.

Every year in spring and fall, billions of birds worldwide are on the move to their seasonal homes. Everyone's heard a fact or two about migration, but specific details about these major movements aren't as well known. Here's a primer on how these feathered travelers make their journeys.

Where do they go, and when?

Not all birds are great travelers; some stay home. A downy woodpecker or a chickadee might spend its whole life close to where it hatched. Others do move, but only short distances. For example, certain kinds of grouse migrate by walking, putting only 10 or 12 miles between their summer and winter territories.

Birds of a feather don't always flock together when it comes to migration. Some American robins fly from Canada to Florida in fall, but others in mild climates stay in the same place all year. An individual robin might even go south one year but remain up north the next.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: SUMIKOPHOTO; ABOVE: KIRK GEISLER;

On the other hand, some species make astonishing journeys every year. American golden-plovers travel from the tundras of northern Canada and Alaska to southern South America in fall. Arctic terns fly even farther, moving from the cold, northernmost Canadian islands or the north side of Greenland all the way to the edge of the Antarctic. They log some serious mileage—their yearly round trip can total more than 25,000 miles.

Although we typically think of birds as flying north in spring and south in fall, they don't all fit that assumption. Some hummingbirds in the Southwest and Mexico begin their "spring" flight in January, and certain species travel east and west rather than north and south. A few sandpipers begin their "fall" migration before the end of June, and they start by flying east across Canada. Migration occurs every day of the year, and in every direction.

How do they find their way?

As amazing as it seems, an oriole that nests in your area could make its way to Central America, the Caribbean or even South America in fall. And in spring, the same oriole might return to your yard. Though it seems far-fetched, it's not unique—most migrants match this feat.

An Arctic tern (above) embarks on an astonishing 12,000-mile journey from Greenland to Antarctica every fall. Come spring, it does it all over again.

0 5 10 20 30

RIGHT: ATTILA JANDI/ALL SHUTTERSTOCK (3)

FANTASTIC FLIERS

Impressive one-way travel distances of a few common migratory birds.

EASTERN PHOEBE
Pennsylvania to Georgia: 600 miles

AMERICAN ROBIN
Michigan to Florida: 1,000 miles

CAPE MAY WARBLER
Ontario to Jamaica: 2,200 miles

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD
Minnesota to Costa Rica: 3,000 miles

BLACKPOLL WARBLER
Alaska to Brazil: 6,000 miles

AMERICAN GOLDEN-PLOVER
Northern Canada to Argentina: 8,000 miles

ARCTIC TERN
Greenland to Antarctica: 12,000 miles

Cape May warbler

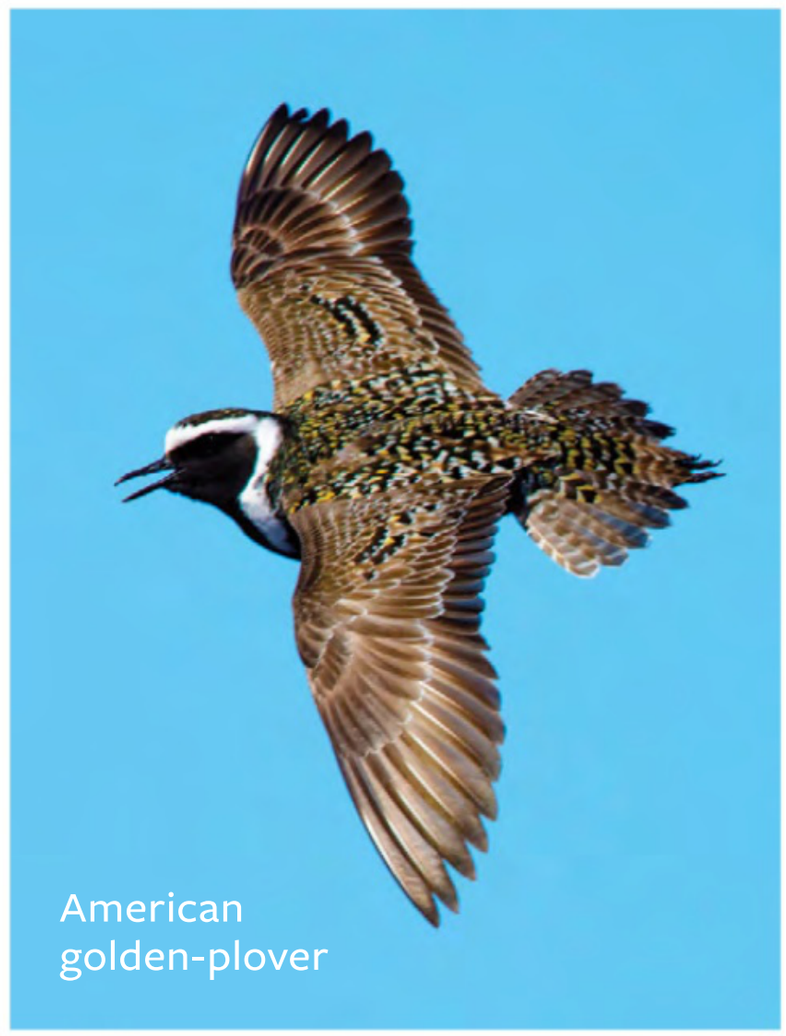
A few birds, like geese and cranes, travel by memory. They fly in daylight and follow landmarks. Youngsters travel with their parents or with a flock of adults, learning and memorizing the routes. But the recollection-reliant are the exceptions. Most species have an instinct for where to migrate and can navigate on their own.

This is the case with most familiar migratory songbirds, like warblers, tanagers and buntings. Young birds often fly south after their parents depart, and instinct guides them to their wintering grounds. Since many fly at night, they use the stars as their guide. When they journey by day, songbirds navigate using the sun. Birds detect the Earth's magnetic field, which helps them orient their travels, but scientists are still figuring out all the methods birds use to find a particular place with such accuracy.

What's it like to be a migrating bird?

Birds don't simply wake up in the morning and decide to migrate. For them, travel is just one part of a longer process. Before heading south in fall, a bird may molt, or replace, its feathers over several weeks, so it travels in fresh plumage. It's likely to gorge itself on bugs or berries to build up stores of fat that serve as fuel on long flights.

Blackpoll warbler


American golden-plover

Eastern phoebe

Ruby-throated hummingbird

American robin

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DANNY BROWN; AGAMI PHOTO AGENCY/SHUTTERSTOCK (2); BARBARA DIVIS; CHERYL KELLY; DAWN WEISS

Once the bird is ready to go, it waits for good weather. The typical small songbird migrates at night, waiting for an evening with clear skies and light winds blowing in the direction it wants to go. Just after dark, it takes off, climbing rapidly into the sky. As it flies through the night, often more than a thousand feet above the ground, it may give occasional callnotes. Around it in the dark, the bird hears the songs of other migrants—warblers, thrushes, sparrows and more—all traveling in the same direction.

When dawn arrives, the migrant comes down, seeking a place to spend the day. It may have to fly for miles to find a patch of suitable habitat. Then it rests and eats, building up strength for its next flight. It stays a day, a few days or more than a week before it eventually resumes traveling.

Depending on how far the bird is going, it takes anywhere from several days to a couple of months to complete its journey from breeding territory to wintering grounds. Once it settles in for the winter, it may join flocks of other birds or it may defend its territory, depending on the species.

Winter is a relatively relaxed time, absent the pressures of finding a mate and raising young. Then winter starts to shift to early spring and before long our little feathered travelers come north to visit us again. ●

Kenn and Kimberly Kaufman live in northern Ohio near Magee Marsh, one of the most popular spots to observe migrating birds—especially warblers in spring.

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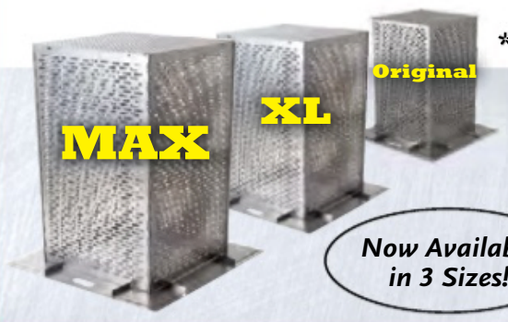

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Ask the Experts

Backyard pros identify fall visitors and foliage.

Q Should I cut back my climbing roses in spring, in fall or not at all?

Nancy Griepentrog WATERLOO, WISCONSIN

Melinda: If your roses bloom only once a year, wait to prune until right after they flower. Prune reblooming climbers in early spring before growth begins. Remove any dead, diseased or very old canes back to ground level for both types of plants. Cut side branches back 3 to 6 inches, leaving at least three or four buds to encourage more flowering. Train these shoots to grow horizontally for even more blossoms the following year.

KEEP IT TIDY All climbing roses, including this Bathsheba English rose, need to be groomed often. Remove damaged or dead leaves from bushes and the surrounding ground to keep plants disease-free.

DAVID AUSTIN ROSES

Q I found this mystery plant deep in the woods. What could it be?

Jim Abe UNION MILLS, NORTH CAROLINA

Melinda: The eye-catching, colorful fruit inspired this plant's common name: American beautyberry. It's native from southwest Maryland to North Carolina and Arkansas, then south to Mexico and the Caribbean. Beautyberry prefers full sun, is drought-tolerant once established and grows to 8 feet tall. It's hardy in Zones 6 to 11. Lavender-pink flowers appear in the summer, followed by vibrant purple fruit. It's related to Japanese and purple beautyberries, which you can also find at nurseries.

Q This quick little bird stayed still just long enough for a photo. What is it?

Greg Mazur BUFFALO, NEW YORK

Kenn and Kimberly: Congratulations on getting a good look and photo. This bird is a red-breasted nuthatch, a tiny acrobat that spends its time moving around rapidly in the treetops, often hanging upside down from a twig or climbing down the trunk headfirst. Red-breasted nuthatches are partly migratory, but in your area of New York, you should see them all year. Entice them to your feeders with sunflower seeds, peanuts or suet to get the best view.

Q Why shouldn't we put bread or bacon grease in homemade suet?

Carol Coburn LONGMONT, COLORADO

Kenn and Kimberly: We know it seems as if bacon grease should be OK, since it's animal fat just like beef suet. But the preservatives in bacon contain carcinogenic compounds that are harmful to birds. When it comes to bread, it's sort of like junk food for birds—it offers very little nutritional value for them. So if they consume it on a regular basis, the lack of nutrients causes vitamin deficiencies that lead to serious, even fatal health issues. With so many safe and healthy options for feeding birds, it's best to avoid these two potentially harmful items.

Q Birds do not visit the waterfall I installed in my yard. What is the problem?

Christine Lopez STAFFORD, VIRGINIA

Kenn and Kimberly: Moving water is usually a magnet for birds. Without seeing the exact layout of your waterfall, it's hard to say what to do to attract more visitors. The water could be flowing too fast, or there might not be enough shallow spots for bathing or rough-textured edges where birds can perch while drinking. If you can, try putting some large, flat rocks in the water. Find ones big enough to create areas where the water is less than an inch deep, just downstream from larger emergent rocks that will partially block the flow.

ATTRACT AUTUMN FLIERS *As the weather gets cold, your feeder may get busier with nuthatches and other hungry birds. Serve sunflower, safflower and thistle seeds, and offer suet, peanut butter and dried fruit. Be sure to provide unfrozen fresh water, too!*

RIGHT: ZOYA_AVENIROVNA/ISTOCK

Q What bushes offer good fall color and also attract birds?

Jennifer Broadstreet Hess
MARION, KANSAS

Melinda: Shrubs provide a great opportunity to end the season in a blaze of color, and many also provide food and shelter for birds. Chokeberry has beautiful red fall color and features red or black berries that persist into winter or until the birds gobble them up. Smaller serviceberries can be treated like shrubs. They produce fruit in June and have stunning color in the fall. Many viburnums, including our native American, arrowhead and blackhaw viburnums, produce food and have attractive autumn color. And don't forget about roses. Some fade to a pretty yellow color that contrasts with the tasty rose hips.

Many birds love black chokeberry's fruits, which taste bitter to humans.

Q I came across a group of these butterflies in October. Shouldn't they be heading south?

Susan Higbie GROSSE POINTE FARMS, MICHIGAN

Kenn and Kimberly: You've witnessed a fascinating phenomenon—the migration of painted lady butterflies. They're not common in Michigan and the upper Midwest, but once every few years they suddenly show up in big numbers. This typically happens in summer or fall. The monarch butterflies that migrate through Michigan in autumn are headed south to the mountains of Mexico, but painted ladies don't have such a definite destination, and they may be migrating in any direction.

Q My forsythia bloomed in November. Will it bloom again in spring?

Debbie Sharkey JUNEAU, WISCONSIN

Melinda: I often see forsythia, lilac and other spring-blooming trees produce flowers in the fall. Extreme temperature fluctuations, drought or other stressful growing conditions can trick the plants into thinking they went through the dormant period, causing them to bloom. Buds that flower this late in the year, unfortunately, won't bloom next spring.

Q After we brush our dog, we set the clean fur out for birds. Does the insulation help them in winter?

Jane Carter FALMOUTH, MASSACHUSETTS

Kenn and Kimberly: Putting your dog's fur out for birds to use as nesting material is an imaginative way to recycle. Many birds use animal hair as nest lining material if it's available; for example, in the past, chipping sparrows were famous for using horsehair in their nests. Most birds only use their nests for raising young, and they don't sleep in those nests at other times of the year. However, bluebirds roost in boxes during the winter, and a well-insulated nest left over from summer might help them on the coldest nights.

MEET THE EXPERTS

Kimberly and Kenn Kaufman are the duo behind the Kaufman Field Guide Series. They speak and lead bird trips all over the world.

Melinda Myers, a nationally known, award-winning garden expert and TV/radio host, has written more than 20 books.

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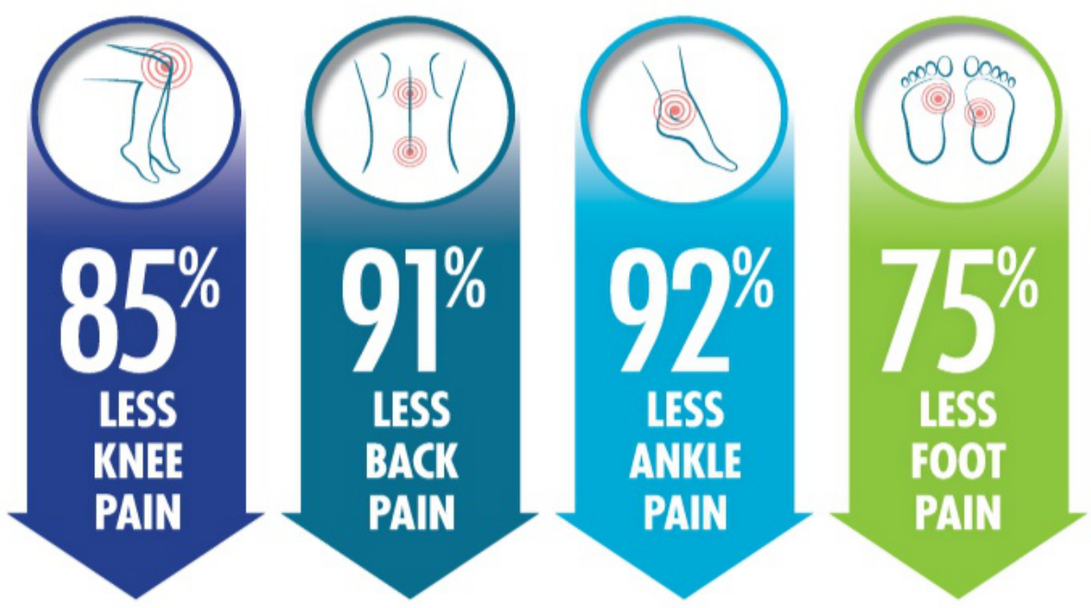

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Barred owls roost during the day, hunting mainly at night.

Night Moves

Learn how owls use their impressive adaptations after dark. **BY RACHEL MAIDL**

Whether in a patch of dense woods or in a suburban yard, owls use their unique and spectacular abilities to master their environment. And all their senses come together to help them thrive when most animals are sound asleep.

What a Sight

Take one look at an owl and you can see why vision is one of its sharpest senses.

"They have large eyes for their body," says Lori Arent, assistant director of the Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota. "They take up something like 3% of their body weight. For humans, it's far less than 1%."

Their peepers are so large that they're fixed in the eye sockets for support, so owls can't move their eyes more than a degree or two. To compensate for that limited eye motion, owls are able to turn their heads 270 degrees.

And owls see a different range of colors than other birds, or even people. They have an abundance of receptors in their eyes called rods, which help pick up light levels, and fewer cones, which are used to detect colors. The trade-off allows them to see prey and avoid obstacles in the dark.

Stealth Mode

These nocturnal fliers have two advantages in low light: They have excellent skills and adaptations to hear rustling leaves and snapping twigs, and they have the ability to fly almost without making a sound.

Listening plays a huge part in hunting. Owls bob their heads up and down while trying to hear, in a behavior called triangulation. The goal is to change the location of their ears to home in on where the sound is coming from. To make the

LEFT: CHERYL CALLEN; RIGHT: RICHARD BUOI

Do the Twist!

Owls' ability to turn their heads is certainly worth a second look.

With the help of some exceptional equipment, these birds of prey are able to swivel their heads almost backward. They have 14 vertebrae in their necks, giving them about a 270-degree range of motion. In comparison, humans have seven cervical vertebrae and can turn just 160 degrees. Specialized passages in owls' neck bones allow arteries to pass through. This adaption allows birds to crane their necks without cutting off circulation.

Great horned owls spin their heads around to spot rabbits and other prey.

process easier, several species even have one ear that sits higher than the other.

"Owls that hunt in the depths of darkness, not just dawn or dusk, rely even more on their hearing," Lori says. "Having asymmetric ears helps them localize the sound, at least vertically."

Once they're ready to swoop in, they do so with very little noise. Their wings are lined with fine, comblike fringes that dampen the flapping sound most birds' wings make, letting them glide silently.

Nose Blind

Most birds have a poorly developed sense of taste and smell, and the same is true for owls. While it may seem like a big disadvantage for a predator to not have a tuned-up sniffer, great horned owls benefit from their dulled sense.

"There are not a ton of sensory receptors in great horned owls' nasal passages," Lori says. "Which is good, considering they're the primary predators of skunks!"

Large owls have a taste strictly for meat and dine on a variety of animals, from small rodents like mice and rabbits to birds as large as ptarmigans. But fledglings, which are still learning how to use their impressive abilities, start smaller.

"Young birds do not have the skills to catch small rodents yet," Lori says, "so a lot of them start by going after bugs."

Get a Grip

Once owls lock their eyes (or ears) on prey, one last fantastic asset comes into play: Unlike most hawks and eagles, owls have a fourth opposable toe. Its range of motion is similar to that of a human thumb, as it can move to the front or back of the foot to help owls snatch a field mouse, perch on a limb or move within their nests.

Rachel recently saw a barred owl in the wild. It wasn't using its amazing senses, as it was taking a nap.

Once nearing extinction, tule elk now thrive on Point Reyes' coastal lands.

3 Hot Spots on the Coast

Uncover Point Reyes' abundant wildlife and rich history.

BY EMILY HANNEMANN

1 **Five Brooks Pond** is a haven for birders and hikers. The 0.7-mile loop around the pond is a perfect place to spot many of the 490 bird species that have been viewed at **Point Reyes National Seashore**. Find wood ducks, California quail and more.

2 Be on the lookout for Wilson's snipe and American wigeon at the **Giacomini Wetlands**. When old levees and other equipment from the area's days as a farming hub were removed, the land reverted to its natural state: a marsh brimming with wildlife.

3 Soak up the scenery on the **Tomales Point trail**, a 9.5-mile hike that boasts incredible views of the ocean—especially at sunset. The trail also takes visitors through the **Tule Elk Reserve**, which features one of the largest herds of these awe-inspiring creatures in California.

Point Reyes Lighthouse

SHINE A LIGHT

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Step back in time at the Point Reyes Lighthouse. In 1870, the light began warning sailors of the rocky headlands jutting out along the coast. Enter the lower levels of the building to see the Fresnel lens and clockwork mechanism built in 1867. Check out the foghorns and power generator in the equipment building, and stroll through the visitor center to learn about the lives of lighthouse keepers.

TOP: TORY KALLMAN/SHUTTERSTOCK; BOTTOM: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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What's your best tip to deter aggressive birds?

Readers reveal their tricks for attracting more songbirds and fewer feeder hogs.

I keep aggressive hummingbirds to a minimum by placing multiple feeders in my front yard and a few in the back. Bullies can't be in two places at once, so the others get a chance to sip nectar too!
Rebecca McLaughlin FLATWOODS, KENTUCKY

Upside-down suet feeders mostly attract nuthatches and woodpeckers, not bullies.
Jennifer Broadstreet Hess MARION, KANSAS

We put out a variety of seed and several styles of feeders. **Sue Gronholz** BEAVER DAM, WISCONSIN

Be wary of tray feeders that are easy for grackles to access.

I only use safflower seeds! Grackles (and squirrels) don't like them, but they attract cardinals, finches, chickadees and more.
Laurin McCarley CLOVER, SOUTH CAROLINA

Offer multiple feeders so ruby-throated hummingbirds have ample space.

My favorite bird feeder has customizable perches and a large slippery dome. Heavier birds are too big for the feeder, and squirrels slide right off!
Pat Brown
SPRINGFIELD, VIRGINIA

Rock pigeons mobbed my feeders, so I bought green vinyl-coated wire mesh with 2-by-3-inch holes to surround the trays. Small songbirds get in, but pigeons can't!
Andrew Rivinus
CANBY, OREGON

YOUR TURN!

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TOP: ANNE DONOVAN; BOTTOM: DANIEL SEXTON

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Caption This!

Two European starlings have a conversation over a meal.

Michelle LaBrie of Manchester, New Hampshire, and her friend shared a laugh over this European starling with one wing up, as if it's telling the other bird to scram.

SEND US YOUR CAPTION

Your funny caption for the starling photo could appear in the next issue! Share it with us at *birdsandblooms.com/caption*.

LAST ISSUE'S **WINNING CAPTION**

"I've looked everywhere for my glasses!"

SUBMITTED BY **SHARON EASLY** ERIE, PENNYSYLVANIA

MOCKINGBIRD: JENNY BURDETTE

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PHOTO QUIZ

Bold and Beautiful

How many of these black and white birds can you ID?

answers on the bottom!

Edward Boos
SCALY MOUNTAIN, NORTH CAROLINA

Kimberly Miskiewicz
RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

True or False?

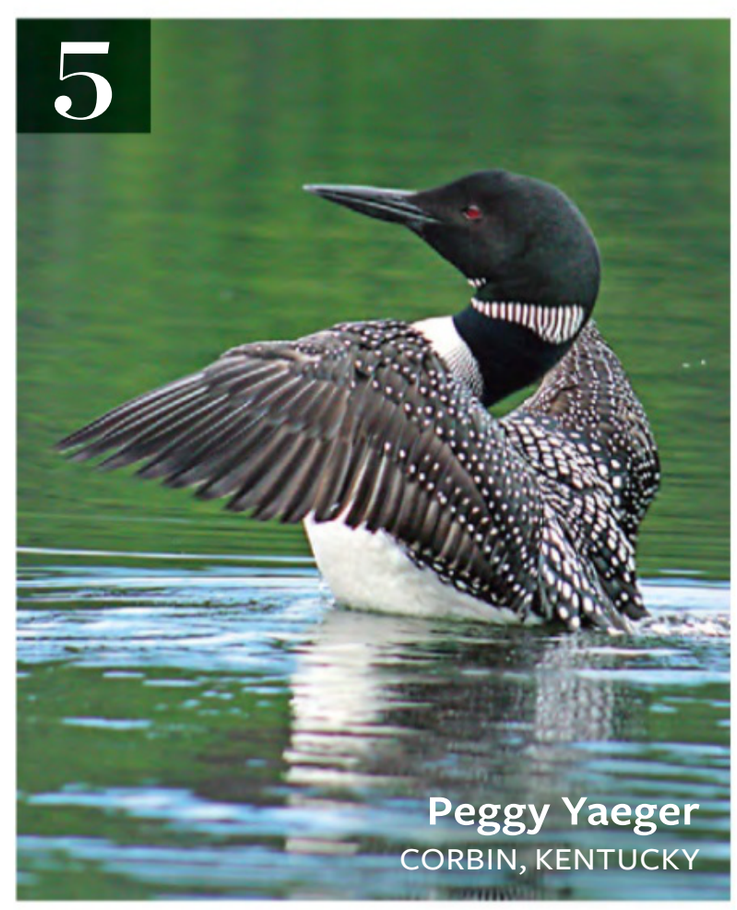
A. THREE BLACKBIRD species live and breed in the U.S. and Canada.

B. MORE THAN 20 North American birds have the word white in their name.

C. MOST WOODPECKERS have a striking variation of black and white feathers, usually accented with red, yellow or tan hues.

Christine Longo
PAWTUCKET, RHODE ISLAND

John Pizniur
RED DEER, ALBERTA



Peggy Yaeger
CORBIN, KENTUCKY

ANSWERS 1. BLACK-NECKED STILTS 2. CAROLINA CHICKADEE 3. FEMALE BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER 4. DOWNY WOODPECKER 5. COMMON LOON A. FALSE; THERE ARE MORE THAN 20 B. TRUE C. TRUE

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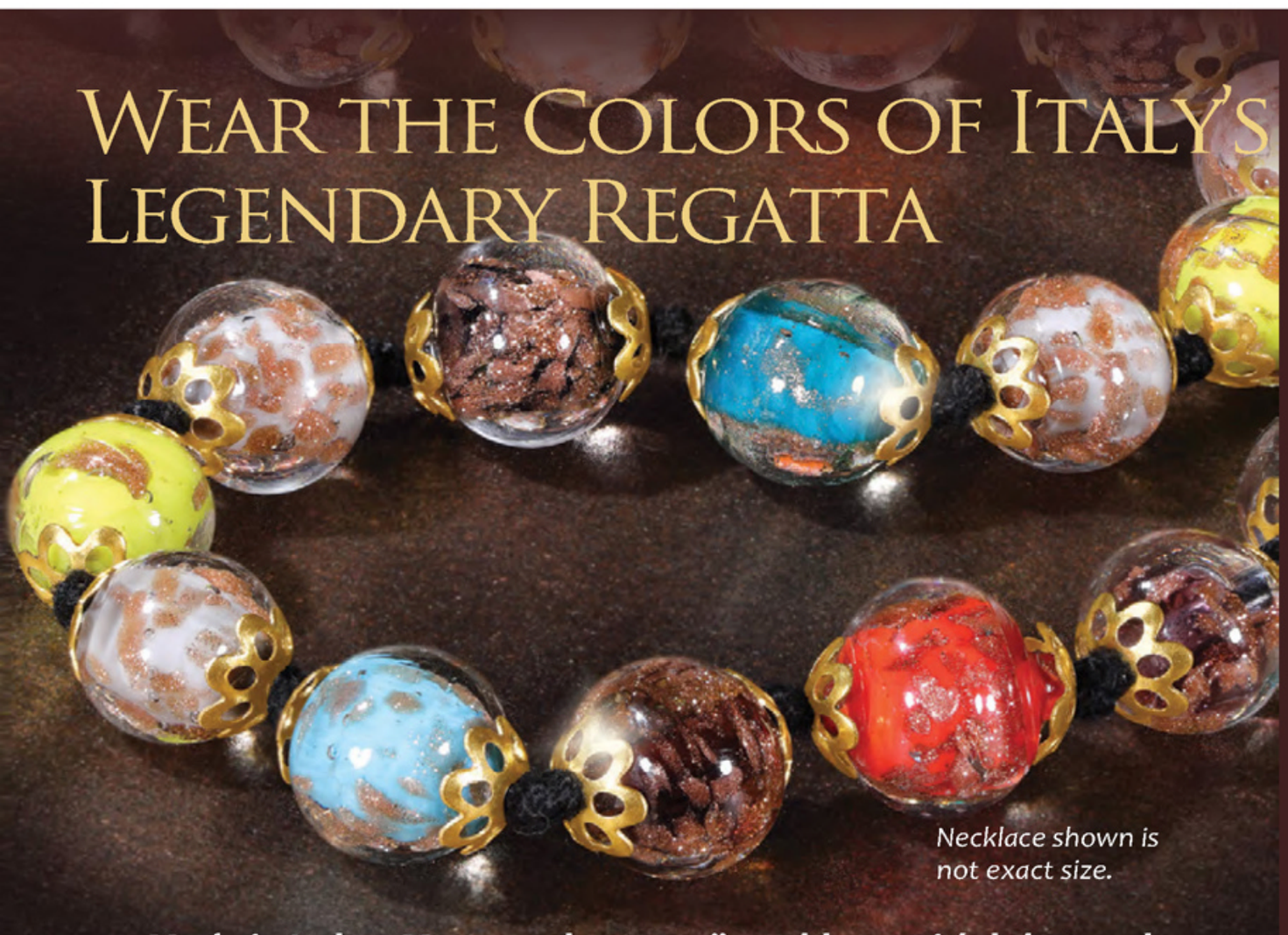
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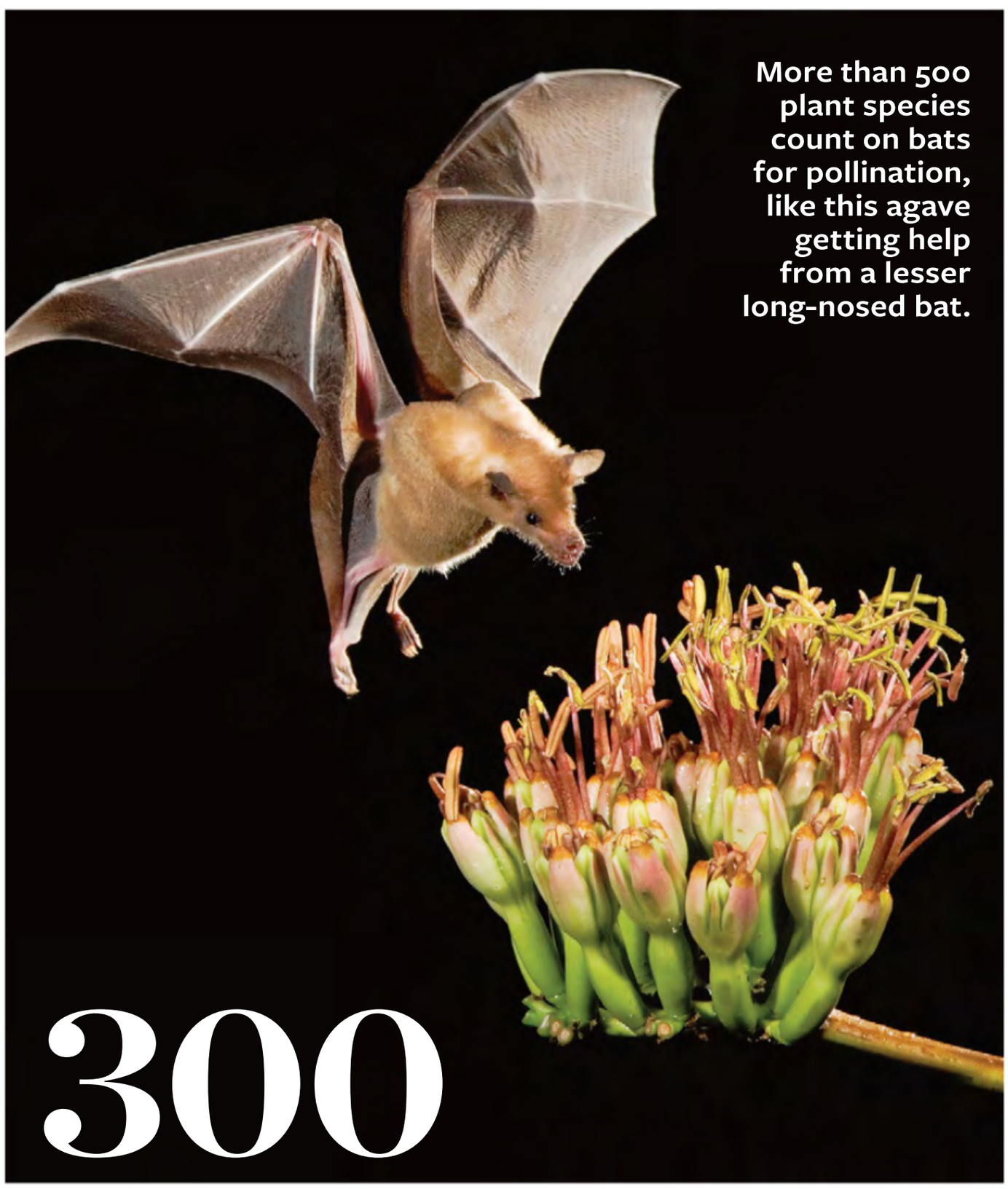
DID YOU KNOW?

Going Bat-ty

Get to know the misunderstood marvels that benefit your garden.

BY EMILY HANNEMANN



More than 500 plant species count on bats for pollination, like this agave getting help from a lesser long-nosed bat.

300

Like bumblebees, bats benefit agriculture. They pollinate more than 300 varieties of fruit, including mangoes and bananas, as well as almond and cashew trees. And if you like tequila, thank bats. They help fertilize agave, tequila's main ingredient.

1 Most female bats have just one pup a year. This small family size makes it hard to maintain population levels and leaves bats very susceptible to dangers like disease, pesticides, habitat loss and deforestation.

1,000

If your outdoor gatherings are mosquito-free, give the credit to bats. Many eat more than 1,000 bugs in an hour, keeping yards and gardens safe from irksome pests.

2 The largest bat in the United States is the greater mastiff—its wings reach 2 feet across. The giant golden-crowned flying fox is the largest bat in the world. Found in the Philippines, its wingspan stretches 5½ feet!

40 Bats live long lives for their tiny size, about 20 years. A few even live to 40! Using their fantastic senses of direction, they may return to the same backyards and nesting places every year.

1,300

Almost 1,300 species of bats are found worldwide. The little brown bat is the most abundant in North America. They pick out different roosts for day, night and hibernation.

Little brown bat

LEFT: ROLF NUSSBAUMER NP; RIGHT: JOHANN SCHUMACHER DESIGN

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> Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.
>
> —*Maya Angelou*

Burrowing owl

LARRY DITTO